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SUBJECT: PREPARATORY MEETING OF THE XVI INTER-AMERICAN
CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOR

REF: NONE

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Preparatory Meeting of the Sixteenth Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina July 22-24. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) led the U.S. delegation, which also included officials from the Department of State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and the U.S. Permanent Mission to the Organization of American States (OAS). Negotiations on the draft Declaration and Plan of Action were generally agreeable, though slow-moving and at times intense. The U.S. succeeded in advancing all priorities, and in deleting or nuancing text that was problematic. The group agreed to have DOL serve as the candidate for the chair of Working Group 1, which examines policy matters. The Preparatory Meeting was preceded by a one day seminar on gender equity. The Meeting of the Sixteenth Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor will take place in Buenos Aires, Argentina October 6-8, 12009. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Declaration and Plan of Action

The issues where the U.S. expected the greatest problems -- migrant workers and the definition of sustainable enterprises -- were resolved in small group negotiations. The U.S. successfully negotiated out language in the draft Declaration suggesting:

- measures by host countries to assist those countries experiencing declining remittances;
- support for welfare-economy production units (NOTE: These are undefined entities promoted by Venezuela and has probably associated with the operations of seized private property that the government has designated as "unproductive" END NOTE);
- a role for governments in legislating the balance of work/life responsibilities between men and women;
- harmonization throughout the region of all government policies on labor; and
- a flow of resources from developed to less developed countries.

The U.S. gained approval for adding "protection of workers' rights" to one of the ministerial sub-themes.

Unexpectedly, tensions peaked during negotiations over language in the draft Plan of Action, in a debate that pitted El Salvador, Chile, the U.S. and Canada, among others, against Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua. Venezuela tried, unsuccessfully, to add new language implying endorsement of worker takeovers of struggling enterprises into the mandate of Working Group 1. A battle of competing points of order ensued and ended with language that altered significantly

Venezuela's original proposal and agreed to by consensus.

13. (U) IACML Leadership

The group proposed to the US delegation that we serve as the candidate for the chair of Working Group 1, which examines policy matters. In this capacity, DOL contributes significantly to the implementation of the IACML's action plan. Vice-chair candidates include Brazil, El Salvador and Guyana. Canada, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay are the candidates to lead candidates for Working Group 2, which addresses ministry of labor capacity building. All candidates are expected to be endorsed by consensus at the October meeting of ministers.

14. (U) Logistical Preparations for the Sixteenth IACML
Argentina announced October 6 through 8 as the revised dates for the Sixteenth Ministerial. The meeting will be held in the San Martin Palace. Meetings of senior officials below ministerial rank, COSATE, and CEATAL will take place the morning of October 6, with sessions for ministers beginning mid-day.

It was confirmed that Secretary Solis would speak at the second plenary session on October 7, "Coordination of Policies and Programs for Promoting Employment and Protecting Workers Rights: A Guiding Framework in Facing the Crisis." Other speakers in this session will be the Ministers of Labor from Argentina and Trinidad and Tobago.

15. (SBU) Bilateral Cooperation

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Argentina's Ministry of Labor expressed interest in pursuing active bilateral cooperation with DOL. U.S. Embassy officials confirmed that Argentina also has raised this issue in conversations with them. Two areas of interest mentioned by Argentina are employment services (One Stop Centers) and dispute resolution. Argentine officials also suggested that our countries could cooperate to provide technical capacity building to third party countries. DOL is consulting with officials in Argentina's Ministry of Labor regarding options for moving forward with bilateral cooperation.

16. (SBU) G-20

The U.S. informed Argentine officials that an invitation will be extended to International Labor Organization (ILO) Director General Juan Somavia to attend the September 2009 G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, PA. Argentina suggested that it would be interesting for the U.S. to consider hosting a jobs conference similar to that held in London prior to the March 2009 G-20. The U.S. will take this suggestion into consideration.

17. (U) Gender

Officials from the OAS and the ILO spoke to DOL about their interest in DOL taking a lead in advancing gender issues in the IACML. DOL agreed to facilitate a dialogue between the ILO gender experts and DOL's Women's Bureau.

The delegate from Costa Rica made a special point to communicate to DOL that her labor ministry's special unit on gender equity had been created as part of the DOL-funded Cumple y Gana project. She highlighted the achievements of the unit and thanked DOL for our support.

18. (U) Sixteenth IACML

The theme of the upcoming meeting of Ministers of Labor is "Facing the Crisis with Development, Decent Work and Social Protection." Member states chose this theme in view of the current economic situation and its impact on employment. The discussions at the meeting will be framed by the following topics: the role of the Ministries of Labor in addressing the crisis; the coordination of policies and programs for promoting employment and the importance of strengthening social dialogue and social protection.

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